Summary of Freshwater Wetlands Assessment Report

In October 2019, the Webster Conservation Commission hired GZA GeoEnvironmental, Inc. to survey the town's wetlands and identify those that were of high quality and therefore good candidates for protection and preservation. Following a ranking procedure known as the NH Method, the company's Certified Wetland Scientists conducted their assessment using GIS mapping data from the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) aerial photos, and on-the-ground field reviews. In all, 25 separate wetland areas were selected to be evaluated and scored.

The NH Method uses the following eleven criteria in its scoring:

(1) ecological integrity, (2) wetland-dependent wildlife habitat, (3) fish and aquatic life habitat, (4) scenic quality, (5) educational potential, ((6) flood storage, (7) ground water recharge, (8) sediment trapping, (9) nutrient trapping/ retention/ transformation, (10) shoreline anchoring. and (11) noteworthiness. One way of looking at these criteria is to consider their practical value. Numbers one through five relate to objective **features** which we appreciate in nature; numbers six through ten are **benefits** we derive from the functions that wetlands perform for us as inhabitants of this world. Number eleven ("noteworthiness") isn't a score so much as a special award for unique qualities – a rare plant or animal, a designated river, even a famous historical site.

By assigning each wetland with scores from zero to ten for each criterion, the GZA calculated a relative ranking of the 25 wetland areas and identified the 15 that ranked highest in value. These "priority candidates" for protection and/or future conservation efforts are indicated in bold type as follows:

Wetland 2 directly borders on the west side of Walker Pond and extends to Long Street. It received perfect scores of 10 for both scenic quality and shoreline anchoring. This beautifully vegetated area receives water from **Wetland 9**, an area extending from the Long Street bridge to the upper reaches of Beaverdam Brook. Beavers were indeed spotted there, so this area received high marks for wildlife habitat and fish and aquatic habitat as well as scenic quality and educational potential. Another scenic area noted was **Wetland 3**, upstream from and bordering Pillsbury Lake, including a portion of Deer Meadow Brook. **Wetland 16,** located on the eastern edge of Webster, north of Pillsbury Lake (and characterized as

"permanently flooded") was tied with **Wetland 9** for scenic quality. **Wetland 23** includes the lower reaches of Deer Meadow Brook as it flows south from Pillsbury Lake. Like **Wetland 16**, it is permanently flooded but was ranked high for shoreline anchoring and ecological integrity. **Wetland 6** is located at the town's southeast corner, bordering Deer Meadow Road. Crossed by power lines, it was ranked higher than all the others for groundwater recharge.

In the north of town, **Wetland 4,** the Blackwater Flood Control Reservoir, is fully protected by the federal government; it was ranked second highest for ecological integrity. **Wetland 10** (home of the Leonard Wildlife Management Area) and **Wetland 11** (Knights Meadow Marsh) are protected by the state and were also rated highly. The highest ecological integrity score, however, went to **Wetland 18**, home to the Youngs Conservation Easement on Little Hill, which rated a rare 10 in ecological integrity and very high in wildlife habitat. On the western edge of town lies **Wetland 7** which includes Trumbull Pond and the extensive Schoodac Brook floodplain. Part of the Corser Family easement, this area received high scores for flood storage and sediment trapping.

Wetland 17, located near the intersection of Tyler and Gerrish Roads, forms the lower floodplain of the Blackwater and is tied with **Wetlands 4** and **10** for second-place ecological honors. It is also rated high in floodwater storage, nutrient transformation, and fish and aquatic habitat. Much of this area is protected by both the Janeway and the Rockefeller easements. Lastly, in the south of town, **Wetlands 22 and 24** ranked highest for sediment trapping, located as they are near a confluence of rivers. **Wetland 25,** which drains **Wetland 24** directly into the Blackwater, was also rated highly for nutrient transformation and floodwater storage.